Cruel council throws out kids

Top city posts shuffled

A MAJOR reshuffle of some of the top posts within Glasgow City Council was announced last week.

Ken Corsar, director of education services, has accepted an offer of early retirement from October 2002.

Filling his role will be Ronnie O'Connor, current director of social work services.

Director of housing services David Comely will become acting director of social work services, with responsibilities for homelessness.

The changes were all rubber-stamped at a meeting of the council's policy and resources sub-committee.

Jimmy Andrews, council chief executive, told the committee organisational changes were necessary because of the housing stock transfer.

Other reasons for the shake-up were the emerging joint futures agenda, community planning proposals and substansial changes to the education service.

EXPOSED ... Prof Gunther von Hagens with one of his creations

Flay-vour of the month

A CONTROVERSIAL exhibition featuring a real human corpse with its organs missing is suitable for under-fives, organisers have insisted.

Glasgow has been chosen as the only Scottish stop on a nationwide tour of the London exhibition Body Worlds, and a bus featuring one of the male exhibits will be at Strathclyde University on June 10.

The London display, which includes 25 whole human bodies with their skin and internal organs removed, caused controversy when critics complained it was too gory for youngsters.

Organisers claim more than a million under-14s have visited the main exhibition and did not find it disturbing.

A spokesman for the exhibition organisers said: "We have had children as young as three and five come to visit the exhibition. Children seem to be more level-headed than adults.

"It is not gruesome, if you don't want to think it is."

Water in the exhibits has been replaced with polymer, which preserves the body and makes the joints moveable.

The technique, known as plastination, was devised by Professor Gunther von Hagens and is used on all 200 specimens at the main exhibition in London's Atlantis Gallery.

Visitor numbers for the exhibition have topped 8.5m since it started touring worldwide in 1997.

Group left in street by 'bully boys'

CRUEL council chiefs have thrown a mother and toddlers group out on the streets – before the group's temporary premises were even ready.

By Chris McAuley

The shock decision by council bosses to evict Penilee Play Group from their closure-threatened building three weeks BEFORE the lease expired has been slammed by parents, local clergy and politicians.

Furious parents are now occupying the Gleddoch Road premises in protest at what they call the "bully-boy tactics" of a "cruel and uncaring council".

When mothers arrived with their children two weeks ago they found council workers removing toys and equipment.

Terrified tots were locked out as workers changed locks.

Culture and leisure chiefs promised the group a room in a neighbouring community centre when their lease expired but, almost a fortnight after the eviction, the premises are still not ready.

Penilee resident Teresa Rennie, 37, said: "This whole episode is disgusting. We have a lease saying we have these premises until June 14 but the council's actions were underhand and devious."

Playleader and parent Liz Martin, 40, added: "I was furious they entered the building and removed our equipment, including personal files on children's individual needs."

The council's bully-boy tactics were also slammed by local priest Father Robert Bradley.

Fr Bradley, who let the group use his parish hall for emergency meetings, said: "According to culture and leisure services, the group can be accommodated in the community centre next door, but it needs repairs which haven't been done."

Scottish Socialist leader, Tommy Sheridan, said the council's actions were "criminal".

He blasted: "I'm absolutely livid about the way parents and children have been treated."

A council spokesman said "a management decision" had been taken to close the premises and shut off water and electricity.

He said: "Everyone was aware it was going to be closing over the next few weeks."

Jobs axed as sports club closes

A SPORTS club that merged with one of Glasgow's top schools has been axed because of crippling debts.

A total of 13 jobs have been lost because of the closure of Laurel Park Sports Club in Anniesland.

Hutchesons' Grammar took over the running of the club last year.

Lottery funding of £420,000 was given to the school by sportscotland on the premise the facility remained open seven days a week.

Another condition of the lottery grant was that prices for using the facility were kept at the same level as Glasgow City Council charges.

School governers claim the club was losing too much money to keep it open.

Cash used for the club will now be pumped into nursery, primary, IT and sports facilities.

Rector John Knowles said: "We very much regret the redundancies but we must plan for the future."

He added that the huge annual rates bill of around £34,000 was a major burden.

"The Sports Club was granted neither charitable nor sporting relief," he said.

The school has been told it will have to repay the £420,000 lottery grant.

The sports club opened in 1998 at a cost of £1.5m and has never made a profit, losing around £400,000 in the past four years. It will close after the summer.

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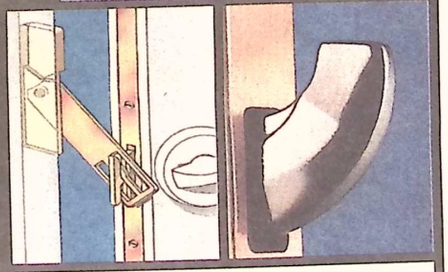

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Standing tall: Now 53, Ervin joined the Black Panthers when his house was burned down by the Ku Klux Klan. 'We didn't know what the Klan were going to do next and I didn't sit around waiting to find out.' Picture: Wattie Cheung

The gun-toting Black Panther who turned into a pussycat

Lorenzo Ervin was 21 and on the run from the FBI when he hijacked a plane to Cuba. Now he's in Glasgow and his biggest worry is the rain. *Aidan Smith* reports

THE Black Panther is standing in the rain, waiting on a train – and him a son of Chattanooga, too. Lorenzo Kom'Boa Ervin is in Glasgow, a long, long way from home, and water is dripping from his beret onto his big, sad face. "Sorry for being late," I say, "and sorry about the rotten weather, too."

"S'okay," he shrugs. "But that's a bit like saying the moon comes up at night. It rains in Scotland, right?"

But our travel traumas don't end there. We call a cab to get to where he's got to be but it arrives late on account of the fact that the taxi firm has just installed a new £1.5 million computer system which, according to the driver, is "mince". This amuses Ervin no end. Then our cabbie takes a wrong turning. Well, you would, wouldn't you, if you were engrossed in your passenger's answer to the question: "Have you ever killed a man?"

Trains which are supposed to run at double the frequency, taxis which are supposed to be easier to hail – so much for progress. Life was a whole lot simpler when you could demand: "Take this plane to Cuba."

Ervin did that once. The FBI had placed a shoot-to-kill order on his head after allegedly framing him for the attempted murder of a Ku Klux Klan leader following the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King in 1968, and he had to get out of town. Fast. "I went to Atlanta but that wasn't far enough," he says in his quiet drawl, completely at odds with the sensational subject matter of his conversation. "The local newspaper put a picture of me on the front page like I was some fugitive from the Wild West. So I went to the airport and a friend wrote me out a letter asking for political asylum in Cuba. I got on a plane bound for Miami and once we were airborne I told the stewardess I was hijacking the plane. She just laughed – I had an Afro back then and looked pretty young, I guess. I told her I had a gun but she ordered me back to my seat. So I showed her the gun – and a grenade. She started screaming. I overpowered the sky marshall and made the pilot re-route. And we flew to Cuba.

"It had to be done. I was a desperate man but the other passengers were really blasé. Some of them joked about it, one woman wanted to be flown direct to the shops, and the rest went back to sleep. There were a lot of hijackings to Cuba back then. In fact, there had been five others that same month."

'It's true that we were on the militant side of every struggle'

When Ervin signed up for the Black Panther Party shortly after its formation in 1966 he was already a veteran of the civil rights struggle. At the age of ten, he joined the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in his home city in Tennessee. The fight for the right to vote, fair employment, decent housing and simply to take a seat on a bus radicalised him for the rest of his life.

With the marches and protests against racism and injustice, his commitment to the cause was absolute during those turbulent times, and he was forced to make personal sacrifices along the way. But finally, at 53, this battle-scarred veteran of the campaign for black rights has found love.

"I gave the cause my all," says Ervin, who bears a dent on the back of his head from a blow with a police stick, a stab wound on his leg inflicted by a Klansman and who claims he was tortured by the CIA before being jailed for 15 years for the hijacking. "I didn't have time for relationships, and although I didn't regret it at the time, I did later – it's natural that any man would.

"When I reached the big five-zero I started thinking, 'Is this it?' As important as the cause is, I was wondering what my life was worth and whether I should be doing something to get me some sense of solace. That was when I met Jonina." Jonina Abron is the former editor of the Black Panther newspaper, although they didn't know each other when both were party activists. "Me being in jail made romance kind of impossible. But now I'm with a beautiful woman and my life has turned down a real interesting road."

It's not every day you get to share a journey with such a driven man. Ervin, who joined the struggle after his house was burned down by the Klan, says people get the wrong idea about the black power movement and the Black Panthers. "First and foremost, party activists were community-based organisers, running support programmes for the black community – they wasn't hiding behind buildings, shooting people. But it's true we were on the militant side of every struggle, no question about that."

And Ervin did fire rifles and shotguns for the cause. "I had to shoot it out with the Klan and the police on occasion and usually it was defensive action. My life was in danger during these days, no question. We didn't know what the Klan were going to do next and I didn't sit around waiting to find out. Sometimes I was beaten by racist cops, who then handed me over to the Klan. Their weapons were baseball bats, motorcycle chains, horsewhips – and police truncheons, for often the Klan *were* the cops."

So did he ever kill a man? "Fortunately, I didn't," he says. Could he have fired the gun or thrown the grenade during that hijack? "I don't know. These were innocent people on that plane, but maybe I could have. I was pretty serious back then."

The Black Panther party disbandmore than two decades ago, but that has not signalled the end of Ervin's work – far from it. "There are Panther reunions but I don't attend them because of the old, bad blood that's still around and I'm not interested in commemorating something's that's defunct, because I'm still active." There's still much work to be done and that's why he's in Glasgow, speaking at meetings, alerting the rest of the world to the racial violence that still exists. "Chattanooga is the number one city of its size in the US for police brutality. And the Klan are still around. They've been blamed for the murder of a local black man just the other day. They tied him to a truck and dragged him for miles. Then they ran over his head."

This trip is at an end and Ervin is at pains to point out that his life is quieter now. "Don't make me out to be a horn-headed monster, dropping bombs all over the place," he insists. He loves jazz – John Coltrane and Miles Davis are heroes – but also dance music. "This visit is kind of a covert mission – an underground radio station in the US called Black Liberation has asked me to bring back some drum'n'bass records."

He will, he vows, marry his woman. "That's a given – the only question is when. And I'm sure that between the two of us, there's still some hell to be raised. I believe that we all serve. Mine has been a tough road, but a necessary one. And after a lifetime of being an activist, it's like a reflex: the minute you see something bad happen, you're right back in there, fighting."

Still, he will surely be glad to get home, to the automatic sunshine and the train that inspired the song – surely that choo-choo runs on time? "Nope. It doesn't run at all, and let me tell you, I'm real mad about that."

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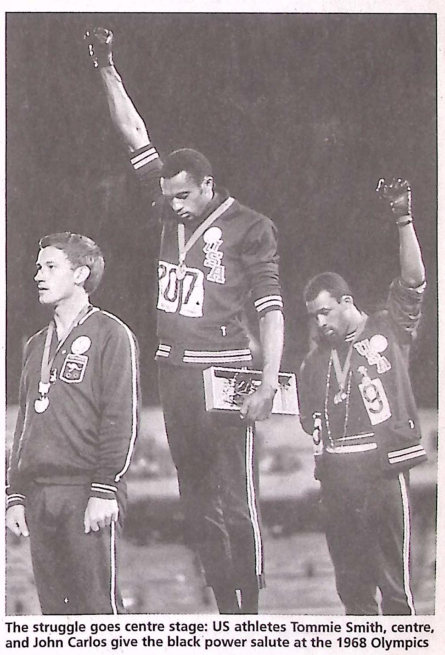
Loaded message: Senior Panther members such as Bobby Seale, left, and Huey Newton were determined to arm all American blacks

When civil rights met black power

THE Black Panther Party – originally named the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence, was founded in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California. While it was first formed to patrol black ghettos and protect residents from police brutality, the Panther movement eventually developed into a Marxist revolutionary group, calling for, among other things:

- Full employment for blacks.
- Payment of compensation to blacks for slavery and exploitation by white Americans.
- Exemption of black men from military service.
- Freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.
- Black people to be tried by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities.
- The arming of all blacks.

At its peak in the late 1960s, Panther membership exceeded 2,000 and the organisation operated chapters in several major cities, including Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles. In the years that followed, numerous violent clashes with police occurred, resulting in the imprisonment of many members, including Newton. The Black Panther Party was effectively disbanded by the early 1980s, having lost many members and fallen out of favour with many American black leaders who objected to its violent methods.



The struggle goes centre stage: US athletes Tommie Smith, centre, and John Carlos give the black power salute at the 1968 Olympics